

## Take Me Back to the Hotel Now

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Summary: Erik thinks Charles is drunk; Charles realizes something is wrong. Erik learns that the most powerful mutant he's ever met can be powerless and vulnerable.

## Take Me Back to the Hotel Now

"I don't know Charles; I think 'Go fuck yourselves,' was pretty clear the first time," Erik murmured, amused, as they entered the Green Street Tavern in Boston for the second time that day.

"You never know!" Charles insisted. "We could use more muscle on our team. Many of our recruits are so young, children really. Why not see if he'll talk a bit before dismissing us this time?"

Erik raised a brow as they sat at the bar. "I think you're just looking to drink tonight, my friend. We could do this at the hotel." He thought longingly of peace and quiet and the chess set Charles had been hauling across the country on their journey to recruit mutants to their cause. A crowded, smoky bar was acceptable when there was no other alternative, but their hotel room was only a block away. He certainly didn't share his friend's affinity for public socializing. They'd only just sat down in the plush chairs of their hotel room to discuss their plans for the next day when Charles had jumped out of his chair and insisted they try again to approach the large, angry man at the bar who'd cursed them earlier that afternoon.

Charles had ignored Erik's last statement and instead ordered two glasses of whisky from the burly bartender with a charming smile.

"Shaw has some strong allies. Having more experienced people on our side would only help our cause," Charles explained. However, Erik saw straight through his cheeky smile; the man just wanted to get out and blow off some steam.

"Well, as long as we're here," Erik finally replied, settling onto the stool next to his friend. They raised their glasses and sipped at them, eyes locked in amusement. For a moment he allowed a flutter of contentment to run through his stomach; the trip had been fun so far. Exciting. Interesting and intriguing. He supposed one night without plotting and planning their next move could be allowed.

Erik cleared his throat roughly against the cheap liquor, but Charles seemed unaffected by the sharpness of their drink. "Is there anyone else in here now?" Erik asked aloud; he'd gotten used to avoiding the word mutant in public, as distasteful as he'd found the censorship at first.

Charles took another sip, eyebrows raised as he glanced around the room, as though he could see some indication of their kind like a tattoo on the faces of the other patrons. Erik watched, fascinated.

"I don't believe so," Charles finally shrugged, going back to his drink.

Erik narrowed his eyes. "You didn't raise your hand," he pointed out.

"How about another round?" Charles announced, already waving the bartender over.

"Charles."

With a puff, Charles raised two fingers to his temple and stared for a moment at the counter top. Erik felt a soft brush against his mind, like a puff of air on his skin from a swiftly passing stranger, and Charles was grinning up at him.

"Just us, I'm afraid," the telepath announced before asking the bartender for refills for each of them.

Satisfied, Erik found himself relaxing despite his mild disappointment; so it really would be socializing and revelry tonight. He supposed it could be tolerable with Charles at his side. Perhaps he could work out more of what his friend could actually do with his powers. It wasn't a topic that had come up yet, and he wondered what sort of tricks Charles could have up his sleeve.

But first, "I have to piss," he announced quietly to Charles, who sputtered slightly into his drink as Erik walked away.

By the time he returned, Charles had made a friend. There were two fresh glasses of whisky in front of him, and a thin, older man sitting next to him, laughing at some no doubt exquisitely charming remark Charles had made about the weather.

Erik eyed the rest of the bar, which had filled while he'd been in the restroom, and wondered how he could get out of participating in small talk with humans this evening. Eventually, he made his way back to his stool and took a sip of his fresh drink, determined to make an excuse about having a headache in order to retreat back to the hotel.

"Erik!" Charles announced happily as he sat. "This is Christopher,"

he gestured to the man on his other side. "He works in real estate in Boston, and he's never met anyone with an English accent before. Can you believe that?"

Considering the way Charles's new friend was fidgeting and tapping his fingers onto the counter top, Erik could tell this poor human had been roped into an overenthusiastic conversation that he hadn't anticipated. Charles tended to do that; he was fascinated with whatever anyone had to say.

Erik smirked at the human, but Christopher stared down at his drink and occasionally glanced at Charles. Apparently, he couldn't have even managed to draw in an interesting human.

So Erik swiveled in his chair, not bothering to respond to Charles's introductions, and instead gazed at the room that was now full of people, who were mostly in pairs or groups of even numbers. Everyone focused on finding a sexual partner; he supposed that was what bars were for, of course. To lower one's inhibitions with alcohol in order to create a false connection with another person and hope that it would last a lifetime. He would make his excuses and leave as soon as he'd finished his drink.

Charles chattered on beside him, and Erik could hear the man next to him responding, his voice tense and high, until suddenly he was gone and Charles had turned away from the bar as well, drink in his hand.

"Well, he left in a hurry," Charles announced, running a hand through his hair.

"And, did you learn anything," Erik began, his voice heavy and condescending, "from that fascinating example of humanity? Or was he in disguise? Hiding a secret, perhaps?"

Gaze heavy on Erik's face, Charles responded, "I didn't go into his mind, if that's what you're implying. But in any case, it never hurts one to engage in conversation. Don't you like talking with people, and getting to know what makes them tick?"

"I hardly think you'd need to converse to understand what makes a person tick."

Erik saw out of the corner of his eye as Charles licked his lips and took a deep breath for a moment, considering. "What I read on the surface of a person's mind is not who they are," he explained, careful and deliberate in his words. "Knowing a person means knowing how they see themselves, how they interpret their surroundings, actions, fellow man." He shifted uneasily. "Plus it's more interesting to glean it from conversation over hours or days or years rather than over minutes of prying."

"There it is," Erik stated lightly, but inside, irritation uncoiled in his gut until a bite leapt, "You certainly seemed to know me before we shared long conversations over a game of chess."

Charles took a deep breath, and then another sip of his whisky. "Iâ€¢," he licked his lips. "I saw quite a bit underwater. That time. In the water." He ran his free hand through his hair and swiftly turned back to the bar, leaning his elbows heavily on the counter

top.

Perhaps it had been too biting, Erik thought. But he pressed anyway, turning to face the bar as well. "You saw a man drowning, and decided that it meant you were allowed to rummage through his brain, his whole life?"

Charles let out a puff of breath, one hand still embedded in his thick, dark hair. "I, umâ€œI don't think that was my exact intention, butâ€œ. Perhaps I believed it would help? At the timeâ€œ.," he trailed off, and Erik made a realization.

"You're drunk," he stated quietly, setting his own drink down. Charles had downed an entire glass of whisky, two shots probably, before he'd gone to the restroom. Who knows how many he'd had while Erik was gone, or during his conversation with that random human? During their chess matches, they usually had only one or two glasses apiece, and that was enough to make Erik sleep well, but not enough to affect his chess playing. Once they'd had too many to count, finishing off the decanter of premium aged whisky Charles had managed to abscond for them; Charles seemed as drunk now as he had been then.

"I don't think I am," Charles responded slowly, glancing at the bartender. His eyebrows were drawn together, and his free hand moved from his hair to his mouth as he considered. Erik chuckled into his glass even as he wished they actually were back at the hotel, if only so he could beat Charles as badly in a chess match as he'd beat him that night. They'd both been sloppy, distracted by long digressions in conversation, but Erik had managed to focus on the game longer than Charles, who'd always valued socialization over strategy; people over results.

When he looked back at his friend, Charles still looked thoughtful, confused. "How many did you have?" Erik asked out of curiosity; it was a number he intended to keep in mind for later matches.

But Charles only shook his head, his gaze moving to the hand still wrapped around an almost empty glass of whisky, and said, "It was only the two, wasn't it?" And suddenly, his right hand jerked away from the glass as though it had burned him.

"Erik?" he asked, his voice suddenly low and quiet. His gaze hadn't shifted from the glass. "Could you take me back to the hotel now?"

Brows furrowed, Erik nodded. "Of course," he replied, then downed the rest of his whisky and removed some cash from his wallet. When he looked again, Charles's eyes were focused on Erik's now empty glass, a look of confusion and distress across his features.

As he stood, Erik watched Charles slide off of the bar stool next to him. Getting an intoxicated friend home wasn't something Erik could say he'd done often in his life, but it certainly wasn't a burden on him, particularly since he was sharing a hotel room with Charles. For some reason, the strange request echoed in Erik's head as he and his friend left the bar and walked down the street, the sun only just setting on the Boston city-scape; "Could you take me back to the hotel now?"

Not, "Let's leave now," or "Let's go back to the hotel now," but "Could you take me backâ€|. Erik supposed Charles must have had more to drink than he'd imagined was possible for a five minute trip to the bathroom. Perhaps Charles and his human friend had ordered drinks without him realizing as Erik had gazed around the bar next to them, lost in thought.

In any case, they made it through the hotel lobby and halfway up the staircase before Charles stumbled, barely catching himself with his hands in time to miss falling nose-first into the carpeted stair between the ground and first floors.

Erik watched him, bewildered for a moment, before sprinting down a few stairs to help his friend to his feet; he'd been walking ahead, ready to break out the chess board and annihilate Charles.

The bumbling, giggling apologies that Erik had expected to let loose from the drunken professor never came as he held his arm up the rest of the staircase. And Charles didn't let go of Erik's arm as they walked along the hallway to room 204; shaky hands clutched at his shoulder and forearm as Erik unlocked the door and walked slowly inside, locking the door again behind him.

Perhaps chess really wouldn't be fair at this point.

Erik helped Charles into the chair by the entryway. A short, narrow hall led to a wider room with two full-sized beds wrapped in tacky orange and green bedding under a window each, and around the corner to the right of the entryway, Erik knew, was a bathroom with a shag carpet in front of the toilet; he imagined Charles would be spending much of the night on his knees on that carpet, and figured at least it wasn't cold linoleum.

Charles breathed heavily in the chair as though the stairs and hallway had been a burden on his physique. The chess game was certainly out of the question at this point, but Erik could accept that; he knew his friend had brought along enough reading material to keep him entertained for the evening as the telepath slept off his drinks.

"Charles," he started, voice light and amused, "you really must learn to hold you liquor."

He looked then at Charles, really looked, at saw that his friend was sweating visibly, his right hand shoved roughly into his thick hair, clenching and unclenching in a rhythm, his left hand doing the same to the arm of the chair. Charles's eyes were staring, unseeing, at the blank wall across from the chair, not three feet away. Erik turned to look to be sure; there was nothing there.

"I'm sorryâ€|," Charles began, but when his mouth opened again, he licked his lips and said nothing more. His feet twisted on the plush carpet as though he couldn't quite sit still.

Erik watched him for a moment, entirely unsure of how to proceed; he felt like he was waiting for Charles to get up and stumble into bed, or throw up everywhere and pass out. But the telepath fidgeted, uncomfortable, in the chair, until he finally stated, "I thinkâ€| I think he put something in my drink."

And then Charles gasped, as though he'd shocked and surprised himself.

Erik watched his face for a moment longer. That moment stretched, as though in slow motion, as Erik processed what he'd just said. Someone had put something in Charles's drink? Something?

And then, finally, he felt everything connect. The human at the bar who wouldn't look at Erik, only Charles, and the way he'd left so suddenly, Charles's hand jerking back from the whisky glass, staring at it for so long before he'd spoken again, 'It was only the two, wasn't it?', and 'Could you take me back to the hotel now?' all running together in his head as though all the events had occurred in the same moment in time, all thrumming now through him like strikes to his heart and gut, leaving him breathless.

"God d-", his gasp cut him off. "Charles."

Because they hadn't taken place at the same time; Erik had been there for each instance, each clue, and hadn't noted any of them. He hadn't seen anything more than curiosity in the interactions between his friend, his only friend, and a human who meant toâ€|what? Assault Charles? Hurt him?

But the telepath still wasn't looking at Erik, still gazed at the white wall in front of his face as he asked, "Could you move me to the bed please? I feelâ€|."

And Erik stepped to him, lifted him by the arms easily enough, and placed him on the bed farthest from the door, the one Charles always claimed by default when they arrived at a new hotel. Charles, the trusting, delusional pacifist who didn't believe that any harm could come to him, or even to Erik apparently, as he'd mocked him when Erik had revealed his need to be nearest the slim piece of metal which locked out the world, separate the other from them.

And now who was suffering from the other? "God damnit," Erik muttered as he settled Charles onto the farthest bed from the door, noting the tension in his friend's body; Charles's hands clutched the comforter on the bed, his legs shifting restlessly, even as his face sought Erik's, his brows drawn together, eyes tight in concentration as he announced, "I think it should pass," and Erik pulled in a deep breath before responding, "I should call Hank."

Hank, the scientist, he would know what to do. He'd strapped Charles to that machine weeks before, and all his calculations, somehow miraculously made without a telepath present, had been proven safe and useful; Hank would know what to do.

But Charles protested, "Don't! Don't call Hank. He doesn't need to knowâ€|. It will pass eventually," which only made Erik more upset, made his stomach coil into a tight knot of anxiety and frustration as Charles writhed on the bed, sweat beading at the temples he normally used to control the world, fists clenching and unclenching in the disgusting orange quilt under him.

'How would he know that?' Is what Erik wondered, more methodical and doubting as he lifted the hotel phone next to the bed, prepared to dial the number for the CIA headquarters where he knew Hank was staying, but in the next moment, 'How would he know that?' he

wondered, alarmed and breath stolen, lungs incapable of fulfilling his need at that moment as the implications filled his mind and he forgot the number altogether and stared at Charles and finally asked aloud, "How would you know that?"

And Charles licked his lips, managed to lift a hand to his face, to his hair, as though in concentration in order to answer, "A friend of Raven'sâ€|it happened to herâ€|I helped her." And that alone, though Erik wondered if it should have, released the tension in Erik's shoulders and allowed him to lower the phone and place it back on its handle on the bedside table.

Ok, Erik thought. This isn't such a problem. This is something that happens occasionally, in America, he supposed. He pulled the hallway chair over to the side of Charles's bed and settled into it, attempting to calm himself and accept the situation at hand.

This is something that happens, he assured himself. He'd heard of drugs like this, like Rohypnol, which changed the way people acted, made them slower, more compliant, more calm, made them sleep sometimes.

Made them more pliable. More relaxed. Less capable of resisting.

That's what this was, right? He thought to himself. A date-rape drug. That human at the bar, Christopher, he'd slipped a date-rape drug into Charles's drink. Christopher had, at some point in the evening, seen Charles and decided to drug him and assault him. Poor Christopher hadn't realized that Charles was a telepath, more than capable of taking care of himself.

Erik's train of thought was interrupted as Charles's breathing slowed in front of him. His face was still damp from sweat, but his hands, one at his side on the bed spread and one in his hair, had slowly loosened and now lay open, pliant and twitching, one above and one below the telepath's eyes, which still gazed aimlessly in front of him, biting and licking his lips red and dark.

The human, Christopher, obviously had no idea what he was getting himself into when he'd engaged in the telepath. One touch from Charles's mind, and, Erik was sure, the human would have run screaming from the bar, and whether in disgust of the idea of telepathy or the pure strength of Charles's abilities, Erik couldn't be sure. But he was sure, knew with all the twisting rage in his heart at that moment, that Charles would have taught the man a lesson in the end.

"Charles?" Erik asked; but his voice was weak and cracking. He cleared his throat. "Charles," he tried again, strong and sure. The telepath's eyes gazed at him, bottom lip still firmly ensconced inside of his mouth. "You could have stopped him from coming onto you," he assured his friend, though Charles's eyes only blinked. "If he'd stayed, you would have destroyed him."

Suddenly, all Erik wanted was for Charles to affirm that it was true; that no matter what this human Christopher had intended, it wouldn't have been possible with a telepath as powerful as Charles.

"You could stop anyone doing anything," Erik stated, reminding

himself of the time that Charles had projected the image of Erik in women's clothing to Angel; Charles could change the perceptions of the people around him. He could make himself disappear, make terrible people lose interest and leave him alone.

Heavy lidded, deep blue eyes still gazed at Erik, even though his bottom lip had fallen out of his mouth; Charles's full body had gone limp and relaxed as he responded, "Hard to think."

Erik felt himself nod. "But you have to try," he insisted, suddenly standing over his friend. "You can use your powers to â€œ to change what people see. You could make yourself invisible," he suggested. "Make me leave."

Both hands were limp now, open, one at his temple and one at his hip, fingers gently curved upward as though Charles's were fully relaxed, as though he were about to fall asleep although his gaze remained steady and unwavering, though heavy-lidded.

Erik grasped the hand at Charles's temple, maneuvering two fingers to his friend's head. "Stop me," he said. "Make me leave. Into the bathroom."

Charles's expression barely changed; but his brows drew together slightly, his lids lowered. "I can't," he said quietly.

Erik felt nothing from him. No movement across his mind or next to it. No nudge suggesting he should leave nor any indication that Charles had even tried to gaze into his thoughts, had tried to influence him in any way.

And the anger, rage, unfurling in the pit of his stomach, at the sight of Charles Xavier's confused and exhausted eyes and pliant body, leaked into his mind as fear.

Releasing the hand that had been gripped tightly against the pale, sweaty skin of his friend's face, Erik took a slow step backward in the room. He suddenly felt strangely distant from the situation. It wasn't a friend in front of him, drugged and tired and about to pass out in the safety of a locked hotel room.

Erik saw Charles Xavier, the most powerful, confident, threatening mutant he'd ever met, reduced to a soft, defenseless body. A human body, no mutation to protect it, nothing but a soft voice and softer eyes. What would Christopher have done with him, had Erik not intervened? Erik could have as easily left the bar after his piss, having noted that Charles was otherwise occupied, and made his way back the hotel alone. Charles would have been, at this very moment, stretched across a man's bed, hands curled and open, lips red and damaged, eyes confused and betrayed, completely incapable of protecting himself from what was coming.

Assault? Rape? Murder?

Charles could have been dead by now.

Erik swallowed the thought down like a pill; the whole line of thought like a necessary burden he would take into his chest, into his stomach, into his memory, and contain tightly, alone.

When Erik returned from the bathroom with a glass of tap water, Charles was gazing at the ceiling again, seemingly half asleep. Erik lifted his head to drink, and let his friend collapse again onto the pillow.

"I'm sorry," Charles stated again, eyes drooping, threatening to close altogether. "Embarrassing," Erik heard him murmur as he drifted into an uneasy sleep, loose hands still twitching as though attempting to grab at the comforter again.

Erik couldn't find anything in him to respond to that. So he pulled the blanket out from under his friend, ignoring how the pliant body failed to acknowledge the movement, and with shaky hands, tucked the telepath into the bed farthest from the door.

End  
file.